

Guide to the Rebecca Latimer Papers, 1914-2000

Finding aid prepared by Karma Pippin
Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College

Contact Information:

Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College
5000 MacArthur Boulevard
Oakland CA 94613
Phone: (510) 430-2047
Email: special_collections@mills.edu

Processed by:

Karma Pippin with the assistance of Marin Hood

Date Completed:

March 2005; Revised 2016; Revised March 2020

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Descriptive Summary:

Extent: ca. 50 linear feet

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Administrative Information:

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Preferred Citation: [item], Rebecca Latimer Papers, 1914-2000, Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College

Biographical Note:

Rebecca McRae Haigh Latimer was born in Rutherford, New Jersey on September 9, 1905. She wrote that "As soon as I learned to write I began filling notebooks with verse, stories and diaries." She was taught by an aunt until entering public school at the seventh grade level in Essex Fells and graduated from high school in Cranford in three years at the age of sixteen. "My father thought educated women made poor wives," so

she taught herself typing and shorthand and went off to live in the Village in New York in 1927. She worked for Harry Hatcher, editor of the investigative magazine *Plain Talk*, then in 1928, after her first encounter with Europe, she moved with him to the then almost unknown *New Yorker*.

By 1929 she had surprised herself by marrying a “newly-minted” Foreign Service officer, Frederick P. Latimer, Jr., and setting off for Latin America.

As the wife of a Foreign Service officer, Rebecca Latimer spent most of twenty-five years abroad: El Salvador (1929-1931), Estonia (1931-1933), Finland (1933-1936), Turkey (1936-1941 and 1950-1954), Honduras (1941-1943), and Panama (1946-1950). From 1946 to 1950 they were stationed in the United States, mainly in Washington, D.C. and Princeton, N.J. In Estonia they hosted the Lindberghs, who flew in from Russia. They both became greatly attached to Turkey, where they travelled extensively to villages and archeological sites, and developed life-long friends. Fred served in Istanbul from 1936-1939 as head of the Consulate General and in Ankara as Cultural Attaché, then First Secretary, from 1950-1954, his last post before retiring after his twenty-five-years of service. They returned in 1964-1966 on his Fulbright after he acquired his Ph.D from Princeton, thus completing a total of ten years in Turkey. Their first son, Doug, was born in Istanbul and their second, John, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

She found that a Foreign Service wife was as much occupied with official duties as was her husband and as confined within rigid protocols, and that writing for publication was not approved behavior. So she continued to develop manuscripts for the future and meanwhile kept up her copious journals, filled with personal and cultural observations. She wrote extensively of everyone she met (and even of strangers observed, whose natures she would attempt to imagine or intuit) all her life.

Altogether, Bex and Fred Latimer were not typical of State Department people in foreign posts. They were intensely curious about the countries they lived in and interested in meeting and knowing their inhabitants, whereas most of their colleagues limited their social life to themselves and other Americans. As Cultural Attaché in Ankara, Fred was brought into contact with the most interesting people in Turkey, and they counted among their friends Turkey’s greatest composer, playwrights and museum directors. He had a particular bent for languages, and Turkish was among the many he mastered. Rebecca also spoke French, German, Spanish and Turkish. Expectably, their political views were much more liberal than those of their colleagues.

During their U.S. residency for the State Department, Fred’s graduate work and his university teaching, the Latimers lived mainly on the East Coast, in Virginia (1945-1950), Vermont (1954-1966; 1973-1977), and New Hampshire (1968-1972). For years they kept Vermont as a base in summer while having assignments elsewhere (a Fulbright in Turkey, the Hoover Institution at Stanford, and the University of Utah) and Vermont

remained important to them for the rest of their lives. They were in Memphis, where Fred taught at Southwestern University a year, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Their move to Sonoma, California in the late 1970s was made in order to be closer to their two sons. They became deeply involved in that community.

The archive contains typescript manuscripts of substantial autobiographical works and juvenile fiction, and periodical articles published in the 1950s and 1960s. Most of these articles are of episodes in Turkey. Her juvenile novel *Susie and Leyla: Teenagers in Turkey* was published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1963 and her strategy for all the good one might find in a long life, *You're Not Old Until You're Ninety*, by Blue Dolphin Publishing in 1997. She also contributed book reviews to local newspapers and periodicals over the years in the U.S., many of them late in life in Sonoma.

A significant portion of Latimer's archive is her lifetime collection of correspondence. She was a prolific letter-writer at all times and had an extensive and continually evolving set of correspondents.

Rebecca Latimer was nominated "Sonoma Treasure" for 1999 by five of her numerous local friends. She died on August 10, 2000, a month before her 95th birthday.

Arrangement:

The collection is arranged into : Record Group I. Journals and Early Projects and Ephemera; Record Group II. Manuscripts and Publications; Record Group III. Foreign Service; Record Group IV. United States Residency; Record Group V. Subject Files; Record Group VI. Rough Record; Record Group VII. Correspondence; Record Group VIII. Fred Latimer Papers; Record Group IX. Audiovisual Material; Record Group X. Index Cards (eight boxes); Record Group XI. Images; Record Group XII. Emily Paret Haigh Papers.

Scope and Contents:

Record Group I. Journals and Early Projects and Ephemera

This record group consists of early ephemera, personal journals, diaries, daily records, travel logs, and dream books. Series 1. Early Ephemera: childhood and girlhood, courtship and marriage – projects, mementos, and other ephemera, 1914-1929 ; Series 2. Early Journals and Workbooks with prose and verse, 1914-1929; Series 3. Personal Journals 1942-1999; Series 4. "Daybooks": daily agendas recording private tasks, appointments, official obligations and engagements, and local reference information, together with several writer's diaries (work schedules), 1943-1999; Series 5. Travel logs for U.S. trips, 1957-1977; Series 6. Dream journals, 1948-1959.

Record Group II. Manuscripts and Publications. This record group consists of book and periodical publications, drafts, background material, notes, lists, chronologies, extracts from day books and journals, later reflections, writing strategies, production and

marketing of Rebecca Latimer's published and unpublished works. RECORD SUBGROUP 1. Foreign Service book (unpublished). Series 1. Title: *Far from Home*; Series 2. Title: *Other Times, Other Lands*; Series 3. Title: *Forever a Stranger*. RECORD SUBGROUP 2. Other autobiographical books. Series 1. *You're Not Old Until You're Ninety ... Best To Be Prepared, However* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 1997); Series 2: *Autobiography of an Unconscious Feminist* (most material culled from elsewhere in the archive, largely transferred pages from the foreign service book but with more original ephemera; unpublished); Series 3. *The Great Run* (accounts of the Auburn Cup's Western States Endurance Runs of her elder son, Doug). RECORD SUBGROUP 3. Juvenile literature. Series 1. *Susie and Leyla* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1968); Series 2. *Growing up a Stranger* [early titles: *Ambassador's Daughter*; *Diplomat's Daughter*; *An Embassy is not a Home*]; Series 3. *Vermont Story* [other titles: *Being Fifteen Isn't Easy, Even in Vermont*; *The Clearing in the Forest*; *The Leaning Tree. A Vermont Story*]. RECORD SUBGROUP 4. Other manuscripts. Series 1. Short fictional pieces and sketches of people and situations; Series 2. Others' drafts edited by Rebecca Latimer. RECORD SUBGROUP 5. Periodical publications. RECORD SUBGROUP 6. About writing. Articles, quotes, notes, summations, correspondence and related personal material. Series 1. Writers; Series 2. Subjects; Series 3. The Writing Process; Series 4. Publishing.

Record Group III. Foreign Service. This record group consists of short prose pieces, correspondence, diplomatic ephemera and that of local organizations, photographs, chronologies of events, contemporary and later descriptions and reflections, historical notes and long excerpts from other authors. RECORD SUBGROUP 1. Times. Series 1. General and Personal; Series 2. Stories about the Service. RECORD SUBGROUP 2. Places. Series 1. Latin America and Europe; Series 2. Turkey (largely drafts of chapters for a book). RECORD SUBGROUP 3. Subjects. Series 1. Turkey; Series 2. Publications and lectures on foreign places. RECORD SUBGROUP 4. People. Series 1. Women of Turkey; Series 2. Peace Corps, Turkey.

Record Group IV. United States Residency. This record group consists of material reflecting daily life, mainly on the east coast, especially through descriptions, extracts from journals and chronologies from day books, correspondence (usually carbons) but also clips and facts, arranged by location (state), then by date.

Record Group V. Subject Files. This record group consists of material reflecting Latimer's wide range of interests and concerns, in the form of articles and clippings, correspondence, informational or descriptive pieces and extended quotes arranged according to topic. Series 1. General; Series 2. Personal.

Record Group VI. Rough Record (1970-2000). This record group consists of material reflecting daily life, mostly in Sonoma, arranged chronologically; correspondence is mostly carbons (many of letters elsewhere in the archive). Some of the personal correspondence duplicates that elsewhere in the archive. Activist correspondence to

and from many organizations, citizen letters to Washington administration (esp. to President Clinton), ambassadors, congresspeople, editors of local and national news organs, chambers of commerce, the City of Sonoma, chief of police, media, bookstores and theaters and quotidian letters of courtesy or complaint about products and services are abundant throughout and not indexed. Rebecca says that the Rough Record fills a gap between 1968 and 1978 in her journals.

Record Group VII. Correspondence. This record group consists of original correspondence to Rebecca and carbons or photocopies (occasionally originals) of hers to them, together with depictions of them and of her feelings about them and with occasional photographs, articles and clippings. Numerous childhood drawings and letters to relatives start off some correspondents' collections. The larger files are arranged in a sequence of: descriptions, cards, letters, clippings. RECORD SUBGROUP 1. Family. Series 1. Doug Latimer family; Series 2. John Latimer family; Series 3. Fred Latimer's [extended] family; Series 4. Rebecca Latimer's [extended] family. [There are also folders for at least one family member that Rebecca preferred to place among "Friends"]. RECORD SUBGROUP 2. Friends. Series 1. Sets of friends (couples, etc.); Series 2. Men; Series 3. Women; RECORD SUBGROUP 3. Quotidian life; RECORD SUBGROUP 4. Rebecca Latimer legacy: oral history and Rebecca Latimer Archive.

Note: Correspondence relating to political and public issues is also in the Subject Files — General. Correspondence with publishers is with Rebecca's manuscripts. There is correspondence to family and friends throughout the archive (for this last, please refer to the index).

Record Group VIII. Frederick P. Latimer, Jr. Papers. This record group consists of various papers of Rebecca's husband, Fred, primarily correspondence, diaries and a few photographs, beginning with his childhood and foreign service career, and includes a diary and news columns of the journalist Frederick P. Latimer, Sr., Fred's father. Series 1. Papers; Series 2. Diaries and agendas.

Record Group IX. Audiovisual Material. This record group consists mostly of Rebecca's oral journals and MSS and includes interviews with her, interviews of others on themes of bodily and spiritual well-being, and other recordings about or by her. Series 1. Journals 1999-2000 (audiocassettes); Series 2. Foreign Service book (undated) (audiocassettes); Series 3. Autobiography 1996-1999 (audiocassettes); Series 4. *You're Not Old Until You're Ninety* and interviews in the late 1990s (audiocassettes and videotapes); Series 5. Other personal recordings of various dates (audiocassette).

Record Group X. Index Cards. This record group consists of notes or records for a variety of purposes: subjects (including people and places) for the process of writing; or for the indices of final published work; or for the use of her papers ; bibliographies; records of personal or professional correspondence, etc. Series 1. Book file. Foreign

Service book; Series 2. Book file. [Foreign Service book] Turkey 1964-66; Series 3. Subject file; Series 4. Book file [Foreign Service book] Turkey. (History); Series 5. Book file. *You're Not Old Until You're Ninety*; Series 6. Book file. *Autobiography of an Unconscious Feminist*; Series 7. Subject files with original file cabinet locations; Series 8. Turkey correspondence file; Series 9. Address file.

Record Group XI. Images. This record group consists mainly of representations of Rebecca. Series 1. Photographs; Series 2. Artists' portraits.

Record Group XII. Emily Paret Haigh Papers. This record group consists of papers from Rebecca's mother, Emily Story Paret Haigh, including items from Rebecca's grandmother, Emily Louisa Story Paret, Rebecca's Aunt Eleanor and others. Two of the travel diaries describe the same European trip by different family members. A substantial part of this archive is of correspondence from Europe of Dr. George Elliott to Eleanor Paret, whom he at long last married. Series 1. Travel diaries; Series 2. Papers; Series 3. Eleanor Paret correspondence.